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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Division of Functional Intelligence  
Department of State

ATTENTION: Dr. Gustav Pollack,  
EPX/HFI

SUBJECT: Caspian Rail Ferry Will Soon Commence Operations

The attached information concerning the Caspian rail ferry  
was requested verbally by Dr. Pollack on 16 February 1962.

FOR THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, RESEARCH AND REPORTS:

Chief, Economic Research Area

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### Caspian Rail Ferry Will Soon Commence Operations

A rail ferry under construction at the Krasnoye Sormovo Shipyard in Gor'kiy for use on the Caspian Sea between Krasnovodsk and Baku was moved to Baku via the Volga River and the Caspian Sea, arriving at Baku on 20 November 1961. The ferry, the "Sovetskiy Azerbaydzhan", should commence operations soon.

En route to Baku more than three hundred workers of the Krasnoye Sormovo Shipyard continued working on the ship and tested the machinery. The Gor'kiy and Baku shipbuilders pledged to continue to meet their goals ahead of time and put the ferry in operation by the end of 1961, 1/ but this schedule was not met. This is the first of five ferries which are supposed to be in operation on the Krasnovodsk-Baku route by the end of 1965. By 1970 an additional ferry route is planned to connect Krasnovodsk with Makhachkala. 2/

The ferry is expected to traverse the distance between Krasnovodsk and Baku in 11 hours 3/ which will be less than one-sixth of the time for the rail trip by land. 4/ Delivery of freight by rail ferry will also be much faster and cheaper than the method involving transloading from rail to ship and back at Krasnovodsk and Baku. It is said that the ferry crossing will make it possible to reduce the need for capital investment in ships and ports by more than 10 million rubles (new currency) and at the same time reduce operating expenses by at least one million rubles annually. 5/

A senior dispatcher of the Caspian Steamship Company estimated in 1956 that the cost of shipping a freight car from Edelev in the Ukrainian SSR to Tashkent in the Uzbek SSR by the proposed rail ferry would be 40 percent less than the cost of through rail shipment and 32 percent less than the cost by mixed rail shipment with transloading at Baku and Krasnovodsk. 6/ This article also indicated that shippers sending goods from railroad stations on one side of the Caspian to railroad stations on the other tended to prefer the much longer through rail route to mixed rail-water transport because the double transshipment from rail to water and back resulted in losses of cargo and damage to it, and furthermore there was often no saving in time. For this reason 60 percent of the cargoes moving from the North Caucasus and Eastern Ukraine to the Central Asian republics and from the Central Asian republics to the North Caucasus, Ukraine, and South European part of the country were at that time traveling the roundabout through rail route instead of the short rail-water route. This occurred in spite of the fact that the Caspian Steamship Company was transporting dry cargo in mixed rail-water transport on the Baku-Krasnovodsk line at a tremendous financial loss. In 1955 revenues from this traffic amounted to 21.6 rubles per ton (old currency) compared to costs of 55.9 rubles. Of this, 25.3 rubles were transloading expenses.

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From this and other information, it seems likely, if the Caspian Steamship Company has its way, that the first freights to move by rail ferry will be those dry cargoes now undergoing costly double transshipment.

The exact volume and composition of the traffic currently moving over the Caspian between Krasnovodsk and Baku are not known, but grain from the New Lands moving out of Krasnovodsk accounts for most of it. In 1957 almost 600,000 tons of grain were shipped from Krasnovodsk to Baku and Mikhashkhalia 7/ and the volume has been steadily increasing since then, probably amounting to about 720,000 tons in 1961. 8/ Cotton and agricultural equipment are also shipped in this direction. Cotton shipments from Krasnovodsk to Baku are believed to be less than in 1955, when they totaled 48,000 tons. 9/

The volume of cargo moved from Krasnovodsk to Baku over the Caspian was reported by a 1958 Soviet newspaper to be almost 4 times the volume in the opposite direction. 10/ Specific cargoes reported traveling from Baku to Krasnovodsk over the Caspian in 1961 include mineral fertilizer, motor vehicles, and dump trucks for use in the New Lands, as well as flour. Current eastward cargoes probably also include some which were important in earlier years -- sugar, manganese and cement. It is believed that all such cargoes are likely candidates for transportation by rail ferry. 11/

The new rail ferry has an area of almost 2,500 square meters, length of 133.8 meters, 12/ width of over 16 meters, 13/ and is the height of a seven-story building. It is supposed to carry 30 50-ton four-axle freight cars plus 300 passengers. It is estimated by CIA that each rail ferry will be able to transport about 430,000 tons per year.\*

The ferry has four diesel-electric units with a total rated horsepower of 5,000 and is supposed to be able to develop a speed of 30 km per hour. 15/ It is equipped with special stabilizing tanks to permit it to navigate on the Caspian in any stormy weather. 16/ The captain stated that the ship showed "not bad" seagoing qualities in the course of the voyage to Baku, which included a storm on the Caspian. 17/

If original plans were followed, the mast and some other parts of the superstructure were removed during the trip down the Volga in order to permit passage under railway bridges and then reinstalled at Astrakhan before completion of the trip to Baku. The ship was to be 23 meters tall without the mast. 18/ The ship spent two days in Astrakhan preparing for the Caspian trip. 19/

\* A senior dispatcher of the Caspian Steamship Company estimated in 1956 that each ferry would be capable of 153 round trips during a normal 125 day operational period each year. He further estimated a net load of 2,100 tons of freight on each round trip, or 321,300 tons per year. 14/ It is believed, however, that improvements since 1956 in both navigational and port facilities would make more trips possible and an estimate of about 430,000 tons per year for each ferry seems more reasonable under current operating conditions.

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On the trip down the Volga the ferry was accompanied by two tugs as well as a passenger ship for the use of the shipyard workers. The trip was not an easy one. On some of the many Volga sandbars there were only a few centimeters of water under the ferry's hull. Especially great difficulties arose in forcing the Kshevskiy, Podinovskiy, and Krastovskiy sandbars. 20/ A photo showing the ferry en route to Astrakhan appears in Vodnyy transport, 14 November 1961, p. 4.

All Gur'kiy workers of the Kremnoye Sosnoye Shipyard have started to construct a second Caspian rail ferry, the "Sovetskiy Turkmennistan". 21/

Sources

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6. Marshov Flot, No. 8, Aug 56, p. 4. U.
7. CIA. Soviet Shipping Activity in the Caspian Basin 1950-59 and Plans for 1960 and 1965, Dec 60, p. 14-20. S.
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10. Vodnyy transport, 2 Aug 58. U.
11. See 7, above.
12. Pravda, 27 Oct 61, p. 4. U.
13. FBI Economic Item 61 12436, Moscow, 18 Mar 61. U.
14. Marshov Flot, No. 8, Aug 56, p. 4. U.
15. FBI Economic Item 61 12436, Moscow, 18 Mar 61. U.
16. Marshov Flot, No. 8, Aug 56, p. 4. U.
17. Pravda, 21 Nov 61, p. 4. U.
18. Pravda, 18 Mar 61, p. 4. U.
19. Vodnyy transport, 14 Nov 61, p. 2. U.
20. Ibid.
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